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Pacific Partnership 2013: Preparing for the Mission

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By Lt. Cmdr. Lori Christensen, environmental health officer, [U.S. Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery](#)



Pacific Partnership embarked aboard the amphibious dock landing ship USS Pearl Harbor (LSD 52) to Pearl Harbor. Pacific Partnership is the largest disaster response-preparation mission in the Indo-As security by opening dialogue between leaders, fostering friendships and building mutual trust and re better prepared to work together as a coordinated team when a regional disaster strikes. (U.S. Navy p Dexter/Released)

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The Papua New Guinea phase of the mission consists of our American Advanced Liaison (ADVON) team plus a Supervisor of Shipbuilding (SUPSHIP) contractor from Hong Kong, the Australian ADVON members, the [HMAS Tobruk \(Royal Australian Navy\)](#) and the JS Yamaguri (Japan).

Our first three days in Papua New Guinea have been spent in Port Moresby, the capital. We met with members of the Embassy staff this afternoon to discuss our plans for the mission. According to them the biggest public health issues in PNG are rampant gender based violence and un-policed gang rape, which ultimately lead to a variety of serious problems including death and a high rate of cervical cancer from untreated sexually transmitted diseases. We were told also that there has been a rise in gang rape in the Sepik region, where we will be heading for the remainder of our time here. The PNG ministry of health has started a radio campaign to promote awareness of the problems, so we plan to participate in these initiatives. Additionally, there are on-going gender based violence prevention projects sponsored by [USAID](#) and [the Australian Agency for International Development \(AusAID\)](#) that we hope to further develop during our short time here.

The people here are warm and friendly. The one thing that I had heard about, but didn't fully appreciate prior to coming, is the betel nut chewing. This is a seed pod that grows prodigiously here and reportedly gives a buzz similar to nicotine, but much stronger. The mess it creates is horrible. Many people chew the stuff and spits the red juice on the streets, sidewalks, etc. It turns their mouths bright red. It is literally EVERYWHERE and if you didn't know any better, you might think it is blood. The spread of tuberculosis through the spitting is a rising public health concern by the PNG leadership, but is probably not something that we will be able to help combat in the short time we are here. My goal is to meet with the hospital leadership in Vanimo and Wewak and work alongside my teammates to pick two or three realistic targets for the mission.

We will be heading to Wewak shortly to start the Subject Matter Expert Exchange and continue planning for the 10 day mission that will commence later this month.

I will be sure to keep you updated along the way.

To see Lt. Cmdr. Christensen's first blog about PP13, click [here](#).

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